

BOP 'N' ROLL: A LESSON WITH MIKE STERN

Chord Tones and Chromaticism

Mike Stern's playing is steeped in the bebop tradition and is often marked by extensive use of chromatics, similar to that heard in the music of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. Stern mastered the art of weaving in and around chord changes, both by listening religiously to the bebop masters, and by following a systematic and extremely organized practice method shown to him by his longtime teacher, the late Charlie Banacos. This method focuses on embellishing and targeting chord tones, both diatonically and chromatically. Stern strongly advocates this course of study and considers it invaluable in learning to create harmonically detailed lines.

For demonstration purposes, everything here is presented in the key of C major. Further, each concept is presented in single-string fashion, to help you see the intervallic structures, and in position, which is typically how you would employ the device in an improv setting.

Do these exercises with all chord types (maj7, m7, 7, etc.) and in all twelve keys. It's also extremely helpful to write out all of exercises in the remaining eleven keys, for visual reinforcement. This is a *lot* of work, so patience and determination are essential.

1. Chord Tones and Extensions

Play through the chord tones and extensions. As you do, be aware of which chord tone (root, 3rd, 5th, 7th) or extension (9th, #11th, 13th) you're playing. The best way to do this is to say the note and its chord degree aloud. Here is a Cmaj7 chord, with extensions, as played on the fifth string, and as played in third position.

Cmaj7

Diagram showing the chord tones and extensions of Cmaj7 on the fifth string. The notes are: C (3), E (7), G (10), Bb (14), D (17), F (21), Ab (24). Brackets indicate "chord tones" (C, E, G, Bb) and "extensions" (D, F, Ab).

Cmaj7

Diagram showing the chord tones and extensions of Cmaj7 in third position. The notes are: C (3), E (7), G (5), Bb (4), D (7), F (7), Ab (5).

When improvising over a major 7th chord, the two most common scales are Ionian (1-2-3-4-5-6-7) and Lydian (1-2-3-#4-5-6-7).

C Ionian
Cmaj7

Diagram showing the C Ionian scale over Cmaj7. The notes are: C (3), D (5), E (7), F (6), G (10), A (12), B (14), C (15).

Cmaj7

Diagram showing the C Lydian scale over Cmaj7. The notes are: C (3), D (5), E (7), F# (3), G (5), A (7), B (4), C (5).

C Lydian
Cmaj7

Diagram showing the C Lydian scale over Cmaj7. The notes are: C (3), D (5), E (7), F# (9), G (10), A (12), B (14), C (15).

Cmaj7

Diagram showing the C Lydian scale over Cmaj7. The notes are: C (3), D (5), E (7), F# (4), G (5), A (7), B (4), C (5).

JIGSAW

By Mike Stern

Mike Stern's reputation as a monster soloist has long overshadowed his strong compositional talents. However, among those in-the-know, his writing skills are highly revered. Tenor sax giant Michael Brecker, one of Stern's heroes, chose to record Stern's "Choices" on his debut album, *Michael Brecker*, and then put "Suspense," a rhythm changes tune, on his follow-up, *Don't Try This at Home*. Stern's formidable compositional ability is showcased for further examination here in "Jigsaw," from his 1989 album of the same name.

Figure 2—Head

For "Jigsaw," Stern conceived the bass line first, and then wrote the melody around it. His aim was to have the parts weave around each other, to form a complete compositional fabric. The opening melody, a rhythmically dense sixteenth-note foray that leans heavily on the minor 2nd interval (C♯–D), is based primarily on the G blues scale, set over a G Dorian bass line. If you pop the CD into your player, you'll notice the rhythmic counterpart of the guitar and bass parts, which is key to this composition. On beat 1, the bass enters alone (bass part not notated), then on beat 2 the guitar enters and the bass is tacit. Beats 3 and 4 see both guitar and bass together playing the same rhythmic figure, albeit different notes. Then in measure 2, on beat 1, while the bass continues this rhythm, the guitar plays the retrograde version of the rhythm against it, and from beat 3 on, both parts veer away from each other. This intricate interplay between the guitar and bass parts occurs throughout the song.

In measure 8–9, the phrases become rhythmically sparse and come to a cadence of sorts, before getting right back into the groove. This move was inspired by similar phrases Stern heard in the music of jazz pianist Don Grolnick. In measure 18–19, this idea recurs and is extended to lead into the next section, which begins on an F7m7 chord (measure 20). At measure 28, a new phrase begins, this time over an E Dorian bass groove. The melody for this section is fairly straightforward E Dorian (E–F♯–G–A–B–C♯–D) fare. At measure 44, the song transposes up a half step, to F Dorian (F–G–A–B–C–D–E). As a prologue to the solo, the Don Grolnick-inspired section is recalled and extended in measures 51–56, this time employing whole notes for greater rhythmic tension. In measure 57, the original rhythmic scheme returns to lead directly into the solo.

Fig. 2

Head

Moderate Funk ♩ = 116

1 *Gm7

Gtr. 1 (clean)

*Chord symbols reflect overall harmony.

Discover the Extraordinary Songs and Solos of Jazz-Rock Virtuoso Mike Stern

This special edition of Signature Licks includes an interview and lesson with Mike Stern, exclusive gear info, in-depth analysis of 14 songs, plus an audio CD featuring demos of all the music examples in the book!

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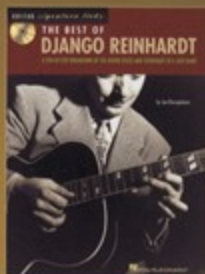
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